Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I'm Judy Simpson. Today we're taking a look at a personal health improvement program with a different twist. The focus is on personal accountability. The program is called accountable to you accountable to me. It's designed to motivate people to do healthy things like quit smoking stop drinking alcohol or lose weight. Joining me our three guests to discuss the program and how was designed. First the Vermont auditor of accounts Tom Salmon Vermont deputy health commissioner Barbara Cimaglio John Klienhans is a senior at Lyndon State College who is the project manager. Welcome to all of you. Barbara before we get into specific elements of the program tell us a little bit about the health issues that this program is designed to address.

Barbara.: This program is designed to address some of our major health issues such as using tobacco alcohol nutrition and fitness. These are linked in some of our biggest problems in health today. We see this program as a real opportunity to give people a boost and support in setting their personal goals.

Judy.: Tom can you explain the basics of how accountable to you accountable to me is going to work?

Tom.: Guest 2011 was a difficult year for so many Vermonters so halfway through the year our office started talking to the department of health about some initiative that could bring accountability and a better health outcome because of the impact. We first started talking about how we can find 1000 people who could decide not to use alcohol not smoke or lose 25 pounds as a way to trigger a focused towards higher performance and reach a number of different success markers. Then after Irene we thought of a forfeit which is how we could find 1000 Vermonters who could save or find a way to raise $2000 for a Vermont charity an Irene fund Vermont Food bank or some other important project. It could be a sick neighbor. That's how it all came about and of course we felt we really need so real blood and social me a skill and that's where we thought of John Klienhans at Lyndon State College.

Judy.: Basically there's four categories people can choose from?

Tom.: Four categories. Some people are signing up for more than one category but it's basically a commitment for people who decide. It want to make a decision they want a vehicle and this is a way they get teamed with a mentor after an easy sign up process or if there on the phone they can call in and get assigned a mentor. We might have a 30 year old
who's helping a 70 year old who's helping a 60 year old lose 25 pounds. It's exciting because it's starting to happen.

Judy.: How does the strategic plan work?

Tom.: The strategic plan in terms of this project is to have any strategic plan is to have goals that are linked to activities that really is tied to the outcome. The strategic plan is that you are first making a decision for setting a goal than the activities are that you would interact with your mentor every week. It could be as easy as a phone call once a week in that you're getting daily emails from the project manager then by the end of the program or there may be no end to the program. People may get to the 12 months and go you know this is a really low impact way. But the way we're going to measure success is where are we a year from now and how many people have participated. They have to stay in touch because there is an incentive program if they stay in the program they can win a prize and we'll talk a little bit more about that.

Judy.: So John as the project manager you're the person who arranges the peer mentoring aspect of the program. Tell us a little bit about how that works and why that link is so important.

Jon.: Essentially when you sign up online. You can sign up on the phone you can sign up by calling me but essentially what they do is get a mentor and then their mentor to somebody else as well. There like the right and tear guide to request of losing 25 pounds or not drinking are not smoking. Essentially as Tom said you could have a 30 year old mentoring a 70 year old. We've established a road map to who is mentoring who and it's based on what you're going through in your life. Say the 30 year old is trying to lose 25 pounds and so was the 70 year old let's see how they work together if the works out it's great. If we need a new mentor after a couple weeks we can reassign them. Its Vermonters helping other Vermonters like what we saw during Irene and it’s great because we have young people involved older people involved middle aged people involved and it's been a great concept so far and have been seeing a lot of success with only a week and 1/2 in.

Judy.: Tom since you're the accountant in the group am going to ask you about the incentive for people who might need them. We talked earlier about them of the prizes?

Tom.: The accountant is interested in this whole concept as is the department of health because the biggest incentive is that people have goals that they want to me and we're trying to improve personal performance. We understand that the impact of the financial statements is unsustainable. 88 to 90% of our healthcare costs are attributed to prevent all diseases poor health choices as the root cause. We have got to attack that monster. We've tried two incentivized the program by getting people around this concept of helping others peer support and knowing that other people matter and that they matter so there's attention given to them each week and there's an incentive to perform well if someone's going to call you on Monday and say how was your week or sending an e-mail. The other incentive is called a prize bowl. It is a proven research method where if you take all active participants anyone who signed up by the 15th of the month and have a drawing. Everyone has a chip and a number. They're going to win on February 1, 200 dollars it could go up to $500. Every month there's going to be a drawing 2 to 500 dollars and what's beautiful about this is people who are trying to save money for a cause whether it's the cancer society food bank spectrum youth. They can win $500 one of these months for their goal of saving $2000. These are some of the incentives plus they have the incentive to go online so many
of them to stay connected with their families. Even if you don't have a computer incentive to be prepared for the phone call will come and say how are you doing? This is really an individualized basis. Some people are using strategies of eating earlier in the night. They're walking 20 minutes are doing 10 pushups are doing five sit-ups are starting their own space in their own plays. Some are doing in Atkins diet or modified south beach everybody knows what they need to do it’s a matter of whether or not they can think about it every day and if somebody's watching.

Judy.: It gives them a new reason to do it.

Tom.: A new reason. We learned in Vermont we knew that we are family in Vermont and basically care about every walk of life and if people want help in Vermont there’s no shortage of people that are willing to help out. We saw the amazing things that happened during Irene. The amazing things of how you do incredible roles when you take the focus off of yourself. But people knowing I have to smoke less or not smoke not drink because that money is costing over $2000 a year. If I don't do those two things and put that money in a jar and every month write a check to spectrum you've or whenever my cause is it's going to keep me accountable. It’s going to keep me happier. It’s the secret sauce that’s going to change that part of somebody inside that's a purpose driven decision.

Judy.: In doing something for self which are also doing something for somebody else.

Tom.: Right and even if you're not into saving money for others program your family's going to see you change. You’re going to change and what we're trying to say as just make the decision. We can make it for you just sign up again on the boat and your life will change and amazing ways. You know it will we've seen it your testimonies. People worry chimed in on life changes right john?

John.: Absolutely we've seen a huge response. When we first launched we were kind of nervous. This is a very grassroots organization were doing this on face book on twitter on different social media sites but we didn't know what the poll was going to be and immediately the seed started going in the ground and the grass is starting to grow. It's been incredible to see whether it's somebody down and Windsor county or somebody up in Caledonia County or somebody over here in Chittenden county talking about their real life struggles and then having the peer mentor in the incentive for a prize bowl and things like that really changing their lives. It's been inspiring especially to a 22 year old kid.

Judy.: Barbara how did the goals of the Vermont Health department intersect with the accountability program.

Barbara.: They align absolutely. Some of our major goals are reducing the number of people who smoke or reducing the number of people who are overweight or obese and reducing the number of people who have high risk use of alcohol. This is another tool to help Vermonters succeed in having better health outcomes. We tend to do it in the health department with more structured programs and we’re just beginning to figure out how to do the social media type of work that reaches a broader audience. This is an interesting pilot for a new approach with social media and were so excited to have John involved as a younger person because one of our target populations for high risk behaviors is the 18 to 25 population. We also know that intergenerational connection is so important. If someone is a grandparent, how they can help their grandchild and the grandchild help the grandparents perhaps because so many of these health problems smoking alcohol use
problems with fitness and weight are intergenerational so we can get people working together we think we can improve all of our outcomes.

Judy.: Also to help make the connection for some older folks who are not social media savvy, who don't know what to do on Facebook or what a tweet is, some of the younger people can help out.

John.: Absolutely and we have a phone mentoring program as well too. If you can't get on the computer or you don't have an Internet connection or whatever it is. We can still do a full mentoring program. My number is going to be on the end of the show and you can just give me a call. Then we can hook you up that way to one of the other folks or people who might live in rural areas who are not connected to the Internet. They will have an ability to participate in the program as well so it’s really doing that and also on Barbara’s point 18 to 25 and the binge drinking and we see this is going to be able to connect young people to an avenue of better health results for their entire life. Stop the problem now and try to get to the problem now our future's going to be so much better.

Barbara.: Another thing that this does is so important is it allows people a way to talk about these typical issues and so many people say I just don't know how to start to talk about an issue that might be somewhat difficult. It says you know everybody is struggling and needs to set goals and it’s OK to talk about these issues and ask for help and help each other. That’s really a part of the secret sauce.

Judy.: There are a lot of programs out there to help people quit smoking to help people quit drinking to help people lose weight buy can be a little overwhelming if you think I have to get the car to drive some some place many times there might be a financial aspect attached to it as well to join a group. This is a way for people to take baby steps towards a goal that they are thinking about.

Barbara.: Just a point that we do have a wealth of programs in the health department that people can get connected to if they desire more structured programs for example quitting smoking we have the Quit Line we have the Quit” in person” programs so this resource will be able to link people with other programs if they desire to get involved. More formal treatments or health care services as well.

Judy.: Tom you talked about bringing greater accountability in general to life in Vermont. How do you think this program is going to help?

Tom.: I think we've seen with for example embezzlement people. People really want accountability. In some way society has had an accountability problem there's been too many excuses and this is a way for people who want to hold themselves accountable. This is a program for 1000 people who decide that they want to have a higher performance in 2012. We're trying to link accountability to health care savings but also health care spending because for every dollar that we spend in government's health care it's actually public support that could've been going to somebody's granddaughter's research at a college or somebody's nephew who's trying to preserve the farm. We’re trying to create this continuum that were all connected and by using peer mentors that are maybe not clinical experts that there's somebody on the other end the line that says you matter and your progress matters are going to hopefully take the government out of people's lives from that perspective. I think that the accountability piece is our best hope for creating a sustainable state and nation. I think people can do amazing things when they are challenged and also
when they have those opportunities for accountability. I've seen so many times in my life when I used to be a classroom teacher. You give responsibility to young people give responsibility to people and they're responsible. This is hopefully a vehicle where people are like “Hold me responsible and I can respond.” That's how it ties to the health care department, the government, the accounting office as well.

Judy.: John how can people find out more about accountable to you accountable to me?

John.: They can go on the web page and they can go on Facebook. It's easy to get there, it's: http://a2youa2me.wordpress.com//. We made a link for it actually. They can contact me through email at: A2youa2me@gmail.com or you can call me at 802-505-7322. There's other ways if you go to the auditor's office and contact the Vermont Department of Health they can find this essentially and then right away after you fill out the SurveyMonkey which is on all those web pages, and will be instantly given a mentor and a mentee and put right into the program. This morning I woke up pretty early to get here from Lyndonville but we put two more people into the program this morning at about 4:30 a.m. this morning.

Judy.: Thank you all for joining me I love the idea that there's a monkey involved too. That’s our program for today I'm Judy Simpson, we will see you again next time on Across the Fence.

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